

Food, Wine & Spirits

The Vineyard Di Bianchini, A Family Legacy

Vino Di Bianchini Winery is located in Shingle Springs on eleven acres where two acres are devoted to wine grapes including Zinfandel, Sangiovese, Syrah and Primitivo. This family operated winery is the evolution of countless generations of passionate winemakers.

Vittorio Bianchini, born in 1859 Nebbiano Italy, grew grapes and made wine as most Italians in rural Tuscany. He passed his knowledge to his son Mario who left Italy in 1920 with his wife, Dina, to start a new life in America.

Mario Bianchini was an immigrant from Tuscany Italy who found himself and his family working for the Southern Pacific Railroad in Fallen Nevada. Mario was not pleased with Nevada offerings and missed the green plants and fertile soil of Italy.

After two years Mario took his family on a major trip over the Sierras to visit relatives in Florin, California (near Sacramento). Mario was quick to announce, "This is little Italy" referring to the vineyards and vegetation he found in California. Mario moved his family to Sacramento county where he leased a vineyard and grew grapes for wineries in the area. Through the years, including the depression era, Mario managed vineyards and made wine for sale and trade. He was well known for his winemaking abilities.

Mario retired from his trade, but mentored his sons Vic, Frank, and Dino who continued to make wine as home winemakers. Mario lived across the street from his son Vic where the wine was processed and stored. Mario would solicit the help of his 10 year-old grandson Vic Jr. who provided the physical labor for racking the wine and cleaning the barrels. It is during this time that Vic Jr. received his first instructions in the art of winemaking. Nonno (Mario) would say this is good for the wine or that is bad for the wine.

In 1973 Vic Jr. organized a wine consortium of cousins and began to make wine independently from his father and uncles with Nonno being the major consultant. The cousins put together their resources and en-

ergies and assisted Vic Jr. in making wine for several years. They labeled their wine Vino di Cugino.

After several years the cousins' interest in the wine waned and for a few years no wine was made. In 1987, Vic Jr. and his lovely wife Carol, bought eleven acres in Shingle Springs with the intentions of growing wine grapes to restart the family traditions. By this time the older generation had set aside the family winemaking traditions as well. Vic Jr. gathered up the remaining wine making equipment and together with his ardent supporter Carol, began building a small winery and planting wine grapes. With the help of Vic's siblings, most notably his brother Tom and sister Teresa Burk and their spouses, Vino Di Bianchini produces and bottles several varietals and blends.

A stalwart group of family and friends assist with the major events of pruning, harvesting, crushing, pressing, racking and bottling throughout the year and are rewarded with a little wine and an annual winemakers dinner in their honor.

Steeped in family traditions, brother Tom, with his own graphic design business, has created various labels depicting and honoring grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts. These labels and others created by Tom have earned many praises. Over the years, Vic Jr. has modernized the equipment, attended a couple of classes at UC Davis and built upon Nonno's teachings, mostly by trial and error and learning from other winemakers.

Beginning in 2000, the Vino Di Bianchini winery entered several of its wines each year into the California State Fair competition for home winemakers and have won numerous double gold, gold, silver and bronze awards. With the encouragement of family and friends, Vino Di Bianchini is investigating the possibility of marketing some of the wine in the future.

Tim Dunn is one of a crew of volunteers who each year gather to harvest vintage grapes and bottle the bounty at Bianchini's vineyard. It is love, passion and comradery -- and always, familia! **Vic and Tom Bianchini, along with 12-15 volunteers, bring in the prize.** Photo by Tim Dunn



Save the Date of November 8th for the 17th annual Winefest

The popular walk-about wine-tasting on Main Street of historic Sutter Creek (2013 photo above) will include over 20 fine Amador wineries, each pouring in the shops. "Save Water; Drink Wine." There will be 23 participating shops, 9 tasting rooms, plus the Sutter Creek Auditorium, all within 3 blocks of historic Main Street.

You'll first head to the Auditorium for a commemorative event wineglass, a map, and wrist band. Start bidding on the Silent Auctions of Art, Wines, and Premier Offerings of Gifts and Event Packages.

Then hit Main Street for lots of sipping, shopping and small bites, each shop designated with a different Amador vintner. Return to the auditorium at 7pm for live music by the "HalDunKen" trio, desserts from the renowned Ingrid's Elegant Cakes and the award-winning Plymouth restaurant 'Taste', after-dinner wines, the Mystery Wine in a Bag" auction, and the exciting final auction bidding.

Advance tickets of \$25 each on sale now via PayPal through www.amadorarts.org AmadorArts is a non-profit organization that has been serving the county for 32 years. Visit www.amadorarts.org or phone 209-267-9038.

A benefit for arts education of AmadorArts.

America's Thirst for Wine Insatiable, Despite Rise of Cocktails, Craft Beer

By David White

Wine industry executives are worried about the growing interest in craft beer and spirits from America's 20- and 30-somethings. That's one takeaway from a fascinating new survey of the wine industry's top executives by Robert Smiley, dean and professor emeritus at the University of California Davis Graduate School of Management.

Smiley's survey is conducted each year and always generates headlines, since Smiley is able to connect with some of wine's heaviest hitters. This year, for instance, senior executives at E&J Gallo, The Wine Group, and Constellation Brands participated. The nation's three largest wine companies, these firms account for nearly half the wine sold in the United States.

Worrying about America's 75 million millennials makes sense. But fearing millennials' interest in craft beer and spirits is misguided. America's thirst for wine appears insatiable. Last year, the nation consumed 892 million gallons of wine, a 40 percent increase from just ten years ago. The United States consumes more wine than any other nation in the world, and one in four adults drinks wine regularly. This trend shows no sign of slowing.

In Smiley's survey, many executives were excited about these numbers and the interest they're seeing from young consumers. "We find that the millennials are fabulous," said one participant (the responses were unattributed). "They're adopting wine at a faster pace and they're a different type of consumer than we've seen in the past."

But many fretted about other alcoholic beverages. Smiley asked executives how their branding strategies ensured 'competitiveness in the growing market of craft beers and cocktails.' "Spirits are going to intrude onto the dining room table," said one executive, "and the mixologist is going to be working with the chef to do cocktails that are paired with foods." Noted another, "I'm worried about it, in that it's sort of a share of stomach issue."

These concerns ignore America's changing food and drinks culture. Researchers at the Beverage Information Group recently examined American drinking habits from 2001 to 2011. While they found that liquid consumption is a zero-sum game, Americans are willing to replace non-alcoholic beverages with alcoholic ones. Indeed, consumers are abandoning juice, soft drinks, milk, and cheap light beer and embracing bottled water, tea, wine, and spirits.

This shift makes sense. In the 1950s and 60s, Coca-Cola was synonymous with American culture. Today's youngest consumers grew up alongside Starbucks, so they've always been comfortable with bitter beverages. Food preferences are also changing. The high-end steakhouses and fast-food burger joints of yesteryear are being

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